The PHILOSOPHIC BASIS *of* FOOD REFORM

By

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IN a paper which I had the honour to present to you at your May Meetings held at Dublin in 1904, I dealt with Mr. Herbert Spencer's attitude towards the question of a reformed diet, from the point of view of his own higher teaching in regard to education. In the present paper, I purpose considering in what relation the dietetic Revolution stands to the doctrine of Evolution, of which Mr. Spencer was said to be the most noted exponent after Darwin.

In the history of struggle which is implied in the term *evolution*, we recognise an impulse towards mastery, not merely as the driving-force but also as the *aim* of evolution. The impulse towards mastery lies behind the evolutionary struggle; the attainment of mastery lies in front of it. In short, evolution *is* mastery. Atom asserts power over atom; species dominate species; kingdom rises against kingdom; the "whole universe groaneth and travaileth" from stage to stage, ever ascending, ever transcending.

Now this struggle which is the essential condition of evolution, is the active state of opposing forces; mastery involves the *master* and the *mastered*; and this dual principle operates throughout the entire domain of nature, physical and metaphysical. Force and substance, aspiration and limitation, positive and negative, masculine and feminine, these and a thousand other "opposites" are but the masks and disguises of

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the fundamental two-in-one ; localisations of the universal, as a number of diseases may be local expressions of one root-malady.

It is clear, however, that the balance of power must be, to some degree, in favour of the positive or aggressive element on the field of the evolutionary conflict. Equality, in the strict sense of the term, would create a dead-lock. The weakest must go to the wall in order that the fittest may survive ; the neck of the ineffectual is put under the heel of the master.

Now the sum-total of the struggle between the aggressive and repressive factors in the evolutionary process, taken at any particular moment in the kingdoms below the human, would be expressed in some terms signifying an advance in the development of physical types. But along with this advance in what we may call a *horizontal* direction, there has been a simultaneous elaboration of *qualities* in what we may call a *vertical* direction. On the physical foundation there has arisen an edifice that is not merely physical ; we are cognizant of something which we may term the *effect* of the edifice, not its bricks and mortar, so to speak ; something which we recognise as the characteristic expression of the man or animal, apart from his anatomical structure and biological phenomena. The tiny bantam in the farmyard chasing the dorking four times his size, is the expression of a differentiation of qualities apart from the differentiation of form, qualities which, in this particular case, are disproportionate to the physical bulk of the rivals.

Whether this simultaneous horizontal and vertical movement is regular or spasmodic, there is, somewhere along the line of advance, a point at which automatic instinct evolves into consciousness, and again a point at which this consciousness becomes self-conscious. In the life of the plant we observe automatic obedience to natural laws ; and though we see something like consciousness in the pushing out of feelers in the direction of support, we do not attribute to such an action the *mental* activity which is manifested in a dog's attempt to open a door ; nor do we in the life of the animal detect any evidence of power to examine its own mental states, which power is the sign and token of *self*-consciousness. Self-consciousness, so far as we can observe, belongs to man alone : he stands upon the apex of the pyramid of evolution and cries : "I know—and I know that I know."

It is evident that when this state of consciousness has been attained, every further presentation to the consciousness must result in its expansion, strengthening and intensification. To the conscious ego there are only two things in the universe—*itself* and its *not-self* ; every addition to or modification of the external universe (the not-self) which

is presented to the conscious self, causes an addition to or modification of that self: knowledge is increased, we say; taste is cultivated; the judgment is quickened and made surer; atom by atom the individual becomes more individualized: seven years hence he may smile at his conviction of to-day; he will continue to grow long after time has ceased to "add one cubit unto his stature."

Inasmuch, therefore, as all further progress on the part of the conscious individual must be in the direction of further individualization, we may accept it as a law that the *aim* of the evolutionary struggle is the achievement of complete individualization of consciousness. Where that process may ultimately land the race does not here concern us: it is sufficient for us now to grasp the fact that such development is inevitable; and it becomes the duty of the conscious individual to co-operate with the evolutionary process by directing his efforts towards the elimination from his life of everything that is calculated to bind him to things pertaining merely to the horizontal plane of his life, since the purpose of those things, so far as he is concerned, has been achieved in the evolution of a perfected physical and mental vehicle, and in the attainment of self-consciousness.

The law of life says *Onward*! There can be no pause: rather does the pace quicken as the consciousness rises: as the tone of life is lifted the vibration increases. Yet if we look around and consider the plain facts of life in the light of this truth, we cannot help being appalled at the universal flagrant violation of the evolutionary law which not merely obtains as an accidental circumstance, but avowedly as the basis of social organization. The necessaries of the body, external and internal, are made occasion, not for harmoniously organized effort towards the supplying of all men with such necessaries, but for a chaotic scramble of being against being, in order that, by the creation of artificial values, one may prosper at the expense of another, so that while some are overworked, others are starved, and both are withdrawn from the real business of life—*to live*. In short, we may state it as an incontrovertible fact that less than one-tenth of the energy of mankind is bestowed upon the vital work of quickening the consciousness, the bulk of its energy being spent in work which decentralizes and dissipates the consciousness. "Labour not for the meat which perisheth;" "take no thought for the morrow," are commands which are set at nought in almost every relationship of civilized life; yet they are the utterances of a perfect understanding of the condition absolutely necessary to the advancement of the race, namely, the condition of perfect freedom. There must be labour, there must be taking of thought. But it is one thing for the

members of a community to combine in fellowship for the production of that which is necessary to their welfare with the minimum of time and friction, and it is quite another thing for individual to be set against individual, and for envy, hatred, and malice to be let loose in industrial strife, and in international conflicts, not one of which is undertaken for the only purpose in the universe which is worthy of conscious beings—the uplifting of the consciousness, but solely for the establishment of some phase of self-consciousness in relation to the lower strata of development from which mankind should be emerging, but in which it seems inclined to fossilise itself. Whether we recognise it or not, the law is woven into the very tegument of the universe, that the attainment of the evolutionary purpose, the achievement of complete individualization of consciousness, is dependent on the attainment of complete individual freedom: any interdependence in the relationships of mankind which is not voluntary, but enforced, is in direct opposition to the essential condition for the evolution of consciousness, since it leads to struggle on the lower planes of man's life, and delays the higher evolution of the individual towards complete consciousness.

Now this freedom which we have seen to be the essential condition for the higher evolution of mankind, may be expressed as the attainment of perfect balance between the constituent elements of a community such as that described in Plato's *Republic*. But such balance must first manifest itself in a prepondering section of the community. We must recognise the necessity of a perfect social organization for the fullest expression of the consciousness of humanity in the future; but that organization will never come until it has first become formulate in the aspiration of the individual. The life of the individual must be so ordered that the exaggeration of an appetite shall not affect detrimentally the operation of the reason or the expression of affection, since reason and affection are of greater value to the community and the individual than the satisfaction of an appetite beyond the limits of absolute necessity. Observe, however, that this attainment of balance and mastery does not mean the suppression or eradication of any attribute of the body. Our senses are the instruments whereby we draw to us the things needful for the sustenance and continuance of the race, and they are thus as essential to us as the sublimest ideal. But it is characteristic of the senses that they press urgently towards their satisfaction—and a little beyond ; and, granted the little beyond, pile up an increasing desire which crystallizes into a tyrannous necessity. From this increase beyond what is absolutely necessary there arises physical derangement which reacts on the mind, and ultimately results in the

impoverishment of the consciousness. Fortunate it would be for the race if this impoverishment of the individual consciousness ended with the individual; but it is far otherwise; its effect is felt by those around; it is passed as a hereditary disability to posterity; it expresses itself in prejudices and false views that react upon, and retard the reformation of, institutions and customs which, in their turn, tend to degrade the consciousness of the race in general, as their precursors degraded the unit in particular. Thus the *vicious* circle is completed; the act of the individual reacts on the individual; "no man liveth unto himself;" "we are members one of another;" the perfect freedom of the individual can only be attained in the perfect freedom of the whole; "all men's good" must be "each man's rule;" and the supreme working principle in the affairs of men must be:—*To take from our fellows, human and sub-human, the irreducible minimum of necessity, and to give to them the maximum of possibility.* This is the golden rule: it has been paraphrased in countless ways in the religions and philosophies of the world; its application is universal. Let us apply it to the matter of food, seeking to evolve principles without reference to questions of expediency or fear of the frown of vested interest.

The minimum of necessity which we are to take from others can only be reached by so living our lives that in matters pertaining to the body we shall be as *self-dependent* as possible. Any breach of this rule will result in the imposition on someone else of the task of providing us with the things which we will not provide for ourselves, and such imposition is at variance with the perfect freedom which we have seen to be an essential condition for the attainment of our evolutionary destiny, complete consciousness. This self-dependence—which must not be confused with any false idea of so-called independence—demands the simplification of life, the abolition of non-essentials, and the bringing of every individual into direct contact with the prime source of supply for every need—the earth. Conformity with this principle—which, being essential to the evolution of the race, must inevitably take place in the future—means the wiping out of a host of artificial pursuits, the disappearance of cities as we know them, and—what is of chief interest to the food reformer—the abolition of the cattle traffic.

Again, since the maximum of physical and mental well-being are essential to the highest and most beneficent expression of any creature, our working principle demands that all foods shall be of the highest quality: that is, that they shall yield the greatest possible amount of nourishment with the least possible strain on the mechanism of the body, and shall leave behind them no trace of derangement or disease. Such

foods cannot include flesh, which yields little nourishment for much strain, and the essential nature of which is to leave behind it a long list of physical and mental ailments.

Further, our working principle demands the choosing of such foods as are most freely yielded ; for in proportion as a food is procured by false pretences—as in fishing, by cowardly cunning—as in rabbit trapping, or by force exercised against force—as in cattle slaughtering, it is a negation of the law of giving : the principle of giving the maximum of possibility permits the witholding of no atom of sympathy and love "for the meanest thing that lives"; and every calorie of energy spent in *taking* by force or craft means a diminution of the energy that should be spent in *giving*.

It will now be clear that the question of the reform of diet is no trivial matter involving only the consideration of what we shall eat, but that rather it has behind it the whole force of evolution, and before it a glorious share in the liberation of humanity from everything that binds its higher nature to its lower, like Prometheus to the cliff.

I have said that the food reform has before it a glorious *share* in the liberation of humanity, and I would emphasise what I have already stated : that the Golden Rule of *give* and *take* which has been deduced as the supreme working principle in line with the force of evolution towards complete consciousness, applies with equal force in every department of life, and will be found trying to realise itself not only in the food reform, but in every other reform movement which we see around us, whether we agree with its aims and methods or not. Consciously or unconsciously, men and nations to-day are turning inwards in search of the truth that the circumference will take care of itself if the centre be pivoted aright : that the greatness which endures depends not on the length of the sceptre but on the stability of the throne : that it is in the inner kingdom that the mastery must be achieved. The kingdom that endures is not won by power nor by might asserted objectively, for the power that has to move beyond its own domain bears evidence of internal impoverishment and central weakness. Not by power, not by might, but by the spirit, by the operation of the individual will to obtain perfect mastery, perfect balance, perfect freedom in the inner kingdom. When that will is in a state of activity, like a great magnet it will adjust the universe to itself : all things will work together for the achievement of its stupendous purpose, the only purpose worthy the efforts of man, the one purpose of the universe—the evolution of a consciousness that must at length embrace the universe and thus become "perfect even as its Father in Heaven is perfect." This is the expression of the highest spiritual

aspiration: it will now also be seen to be the highest philosophical view of the universe and man.

There will be struggle, there will be defeat; but there will also be an invincible advance. Thus it has ever been; for what have been the tumults of history, its revolutions and reactions, its progressions and retrogressions, its turmoil of institutions, laws, customs, expedients, but the titanic struggles of the spirit of man to break through, master, and readjust his limits in a growing conformity with this impulse towards outward and inward freedom? This, in some shape or degree, is the inspiration of all reform, its key, its supreme test: this also is the justification, the solace and prophecy of triumph for all who, in all times and places, have heard in their hearts "the still, sad music of humanity" and sub-humanity, and have lifted up their voices in the cause of truth and justice.

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